

*Before and After 1204: The Versions of
Niketas Choniates' Historia*

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THE *HISTORIA* OF NIKETAS CHONIATES is the single most important source for the crucial era in Byzantine history that begins with the death of Alexios I Komnenos in 1118 and culminates with the capture of Constantinople by the armies of the Fourth Crusade in 1204. It is the only contemporary narrative covering the final decades of the twelfth century, and the only Byzantine eyewitness account of the events of 1204 and its aftermath. The significance of the work as a historical source is equally matched by the insightfulness, sophistication, and stylistic brilliance of its author. Because of this, the *Historia* has been widely utilized by scholars and has exerted a catalytic influence on virtually all modern presentations, which base their narrative and interpretation of the period largely on Choniates' account.¹ It has also been the subject of numerous studies. In particular, the literary aspects of the work have long received considerable attention.² More recently the accuracy of the historian's testimony as well as his profound, critical approach to his subject matter have been much discussed.³

However, modern scholarship has consistently treated the *Historia* as a unitary work despite Jan Louis van Dieten's definitive critical edition of the text, which long ago clearly presented all the codicological and paleographical evidence for the different phases of its composition.⁴ Although it has been widely accepted that van Dieten's contribution is "einer Höhepunkt in der...Geschichte des *Corpus Fontium*

1 See, for example, the most influential modern works on the period: C. M. Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West 1180–1204* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), and M. J. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204: A Political History*, 2nd ed. (London, 1997).

2 In general, see G. Fatouros, "Textkritisches zum Geschichtswerk des Niketas Choniates," *JÖB* 26 (1977): 119–27; idem, "Die Autoren der zweiten Sophistik im Geschichtswerk des Niketas Choniates," *JÖB* 29 (1980): 165–86; A. P. Kazhdan, "Fisionomia dell' intellettuale: Niceta Coniata," in *La produzione intellettuale a Bisanzio: Libri e scrittori in una società colta* (Naples, 1983), 91–128; A. P. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1984), 256–83;

R. Maisano, "Letteratura e Storiografia nell'opera di Niceta Coniata," *Messana* 16 (1993): 41–57; idem, "I poemi Omerici nell'opera Storica di Niceta Coniata," in *Posthomeric: Tradizioni omeriche dall'Antichità al Rinascimento*, ed. F. Montanari and S. Pittaluga (Genoa, 2000), 2:41–45; A. Pontani, "Nebenterminologie, Topoi, Loci Similes und Quellen in einigen Stellen der Chronike diegesis von Niketas Choniates," in *Novum Millennium: Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck*, ed. C. Sode and S. Takács (Aldershot, 2001), 271–78.

3 See F. Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik der byzantinischen Historiographie von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates* (Munich, 1971), 161ff.; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I*

Kommenos 1143–1180 (Cambridge, 1993), esp. 1–19. See also the articles of J. Harris, "Distortion, Divine Providence and Genre in Nicetas Choniates's Account of the Collapse of Byzantium 1180–1204," *JMedHist* 26 (2000): 19–31; idem, "Looking Back on 1204: Nicetas Choniates in Nicaea," *Mésogeios* 12 (2001): 117–24; and most recently, Ia. N. Liubarskii, "Byzantine Irony: The Example of Niketas Choniates," in *Byzantium Matures: Choices, Sensitivities, and Modes of Expression (Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries)*, ed. C. Angelidi (Athens, 2004), 287–98, esp. 297–98.

4 *Nicetae Choniatae, Historia*, CFHB 11 (Berlin–New York, 1975), LVI–CI.

Historiae Byzantinae,” the unique evidence on the sequence of composition of the *Historia* laid out by the editor has yet to be examined and properly utilized.⁵ Yet, this evidence is crucial in any discussion of the work, first and foremost because it permits us to resolve one of the major problems still confronting scholars—the precise dating of the text and the circumstances of its composition. This can no longer remain overlooked. Before using any text as a historical source, it is important to attempt to establish the most precise date possible for its composition and uncover the circumstances—and thus the purpose—behind its undertaking.

The date of composition of the *Historia* has proved difficult to establish for several reasons. First, the surviving manuscripts of the *Historia* offer us no assistance in precisely dating the text. The autograph copy has not survived and, although we possess a significant number of codices close to the time of the author (i.e., of the thirteenth century), these cannot be dated more specifically. Thus, the text can be dated only by internal evidence. This presents us with a number of problems. Foremost of these is the length of the *Historia*, which covers a span of nearly one hundred years of detailed narrative (especially from book four of the reign of Manuel I Komnenos, ca. 1167). The work begins with the reign of John II Komnenos in 1118 and ends with the Greek revolt against the Latins in 1206/7, although Choniates records certain isolated events occurring after this date as well. When we consider that the historian is recording for the most part contemporary events, it is very difficult to pinpoint exactly when he began to work on the text.

No less of a problem is Choniates’ working method. Although he utilizes both a thematic and a chronological structure—he subdivides his work according to imperial reigns and usually (but by no means always) narrates events chronologically—perhaps for cohesion and symmetry he also separates his reports according to regions. This can often confuse the chronological sequence and hinder efforts to establish a timetable for the composition. Choniates, moreover, rather sparingly uses dates, which are included somewhat inconsistently throughout the text. Precise dates of events (day, month, indiction, and year) are rare and unpredictable, while dating by months is occasional and reserved for military campaigns.⁶

His rather elusive and often downright obscure narrative style only magnifies the difficulties. For example, the author takes great pains to

5 Scholars have been almost unanimous in their praise of J.-L. van Dieten’s edition of the *Historia*. See J. Darrouzès, *REB* 35 (1977): 297–98; A. Karpozilos, *Ελληνικά* 31 (1980): 526–28; A. Kazhdan, *BSI* 38 (1977): 54–56; I. Dujčev, *BZ* 72 (1979): 45–53; W.

Hörandner, *JÖB* 26 (1977): 328–30 (whence the quote); J. Irigoin, *REG* 91 (1978): 571–74; O. Kresten, *MittIOG* 85 (1977): 182–85; St. I. Kuruses, *EEBE* 42 (1975/76): 485–86; M. de Waha, *Byzantion* 47 (1977): 532–33.

6 All references collected by A. P.

Kazhdan, *Concordance to Nicetas Choniates’ History*, 16 vols. (unpublished notes housed in the Dumbarton Oaks Library), 2:R108.

conceal the identity of the reigning emperor at the time of composition and in fact refers to him only once, in a passing allusion to those “who rule until now” (329.59; in this article *Historia* numerals refer to page and line numbers in van Dieten’s ed., vol. 1). No less perplexing is Choniates’ metaphorical use of certain terms. The important word *vūv* in certain cases means quite literally “present time,” but in others is used in a rather loose sense to indicate the long-lasting effects of a particular event; the ambiguity can lead to a great deal of confusion.⁷ Finally, the instability of the political situation in the final decades of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century and the relative lack of information concerning the author’s own circumstances are also problematic. The capture of Constantinople in 1204 and the chaos that engulfed the territories of the empire, coupled with Choniates’ own precarious state in those troubled days—i.e., his sojourn in Selymbria, Constantinople, and Nicaea—make it difficult to distinguish which sections were written when, and where.

In his pioneering work on Byzantine literature, which appeared at the close of the nineteenth century, Karl Krumbacher was the first to suggest that the *Historia* was written in two parts—the first in Constantinople prior to 1204 and the second in Nicaea after the fall of the city. He could not definitively date the commencement of the composition, but on the basis of a forward reference to Andronikos I Komnenos’s tyrannical rule, a reference that occurs in book one of the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (50.57–58), he concluded that this book was written after the accession of Isaac II Angelos to the throne in 1185.⁸ Thereafter, Ferdinand Chalandon, who, like Krumbacher, relied on forward references made by Choniates, placed the commencement of the composition a little earlier, concluding that book one of the reign of Manuel I Komnenos was written before the accession of Andronikos I Komnenos, in 1183. In Chalandon’s view, book four of the reign of the same emperor was written after 1185, and book six could have been written only after the capture of Constantinople in 1204.⁹

A little while later, Henri Grégoire concluded, on the basis of an anonymous author who used Choniates as a source, that the chapters of the *Historia* dealing with events prior to 1204 had been circulating in Constantinople “depuis longtemps” and that only the final book of the work, covering events after 1204, was written in Nicaea.¹⁰ Despite van Dieten’s important publication in 1975, a later generation of histo-

7 Ibid., 2: R118.

8 K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches (527–1453)*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1897), 282.

9 *Les Comnène*, vol. 2, *Jean II Comnène*

(1118–1143) et Manuel I Comnène (1143–1180) (Paris, 1912; repr. 1962), XXIV.

10 “Un Continuateur de Constantin Manassès et sa source,” in *Mélanges offerts à M. Gustave Schlumberger* (Paris, 1924), 1:280.

rians followed the same lines. In his survey of secular Byzantine literature, Herbert Hunger suggested that Choniates began working on the *Historia* not long after the accession of Isaac II Angelos.¹¹ And more recently Alexander Kazhdan pointed in the discussion of the reign of Manuel I Komnenos to two passages that could not have been written “long after 1147.”¹²

The variety of opinions reproduced here ultimately result from the aforementioned difficulties in dating the text. Not only have scholars been unable to reach a consensus on the date of composition of the *Historia*, but also virtually no attempt has been made to uncover the circumstances under which it was composed. These issues can be resolved only by using the paleographical and codicological evidence for the *Historia*’s complex production presented by its editor, van Dieten. He subdivided the manuscripts into three families and hence three different versions. In addition, other manuscript families are intermediaries and, in a different register of speech, there is the paraphrase of Choniates’ work into a simpler linguistic level.¹³ The implications of these families are significant. To date accurately and precisely the entire text, the different versions should first be dated. And the circumstances of composition in all its distinct phases should be exposed so as to reveal the purpose of the author and ultimately that of the history.

The first family, referred to by van Dieten as b(revior), has survived in a homogeneous group of codices with many copies—R M D F C Σ Φ T Ψ Ω (containing 1 through 614.7–10)—and represents the older, shorter, unfinished version. It commences with the reign of John II Komnenos in 1118 and ends abruptly with the events of February/March 1205 (i.e., the beginnings of the Greek rebellion against the Latins in Thrace). From this family also stems an epitome of the text that has been preserved in three manuscripts: K N U. The characteris-

11 *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), 1:432.

12 “Introduzione,” in *Grandezza e catastrofe di Bisanzio: Narrazione cronologica*, Nicetas Choniates, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, J.-L. van Dieten, R. Maisano, and A. Pontani (Italy, 1994–99), 1:XVI. Kazhdan probably meant within one generation. However, he seems to have based his opinion on a misunderstanding of Choniates’ metaphorical language. The first passage he selected (book one of Manuel I: 71.64–67) is Choniates’ eyewitness testimony regarding the “mounds of bones” that could still be seen lying on the ground from the battle that occurred on the Meander River on 1 January 1147

between the French crusaders and the Turks (καὶ μαρτυροῦσι τὸ τῶν πεσόντων ἐς δεῦρο πολύποσον οἱ τῶν ὀστέων σωροὶ οὕτω συχνοὶ καὶ μετέωροὶ ὄντες). However, a similar observation was made by Leo the Deacon after the battle between the Byzantines and the Bulgarians on the plains of Anchialos on 20 August 917 (*Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiarum libri X*, ed. C. B. Hase, CSHB 34 [Bonn, 1828], 124.10–11: καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ὁρᾶν εἰσέτι σωρείας ὀστέων). The second passage (book 2: 98.6–10) refers to the transfer of weavers from Thebes and Corinth to Sicily in accordance with the agreement reached between Manuel Komnenos and the king of Sicily in 1147. On this occasion, Choniates

states: καὶ νῦν ἔξεστιν ἰδεῖν τοὺς ἐς Σικελίαν καταίροντας Θηβαίων παῖδας καὶ Κορινθίων ἰσθῶ προσανέχοντας τῶν ἐξαμίτων καὶ χρυσοπάστων στολῶν ὡς Ἐρετριεῖς πάλαι Πέρσαις δουλεύοντας, ὅτι πολέμων ἤρξαν Δαρείῳ στρατεῖαν καθ’ Ἑλλάδος ἐλάσαντι. Choniates’ portrait of the Greeks spinning gold-embroidered robes and his comparison of them with the Eretrians forced to serve the Persians raises doubts about whether this passage has anything to do with actual conditions or for that matter “present time.”

13 See now the critical edition of the paraphrase: *Η Μετάφραση τῆς Χρονικῆς Διηγήσεως του Νικῆτα Χωνιάτη*, ed. J. C. Davis (PhD diss., University of Ioannina, 2004).

tic features of this group are (1) the omission or abridgment of many passages that have come down to us in other manuscripts and strongly criticize emperors and prominent government officials and (2) a discussion of the reign of Alexios III that, when compared to other manuscripts, is significantly shorter and conspicuously less critical.

The second family, a(uctior)—V A “P-after-revision” Γ Δ Θ Λ Ξ M C (only from 614.7) and sections of W—commences, like the b text, with the reign of John II Komnenos, but covers about one and a half years more, that is, through the events of April 1205–November 1206 (614.7–646), although it too was left incomplete by the author. The only direct witness of this version is represented in V, since A is contaminated (by P, V, and the lost original draft that van Dieten has designated χ) and P-after-revision presents a series of corrections and additions based on an exemplar of this version. This group of manuscripts contains strong criticism of emperors and government officials, and a longer and more critical discussion of the reign of Alexios III. Additional distinctive features include harsher criticism of astrology and sorcery, greater interest in banal anecdotes and cruder expressions, and a pervasive tendency to moralize.¹⁴

Manuscript P-prior-to-revision and the greater part of W are intermediaries between b and a. Certain passages that follow version b contain some unrevised additional readings offered in a. Codex P-after-revision (Parisinus gr. 1778, thirteenth century) has striking alterations: the b text was clearly replaced with the a text by the same copyist, evidenced by the erasure of lines of the older text, their careful replacement by the newer version, and a significant enlargement of the text on the margins of the manuscript. The older sections of W (Vind. hist. gr. 105, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) offer the b text, with some deviations, but this codex was fragmentarily revised by two copyists, who inserted large sections of the a text. Thus in some instances W agrees with b and in others with a. Due to the contamination of these manuscripts, van Dieten speaks of PW as a separate family only with strong reservations.¹⁵

Finally, there is the LO family, beginning only on 535.3, that is, with the arrival of the Fourth Crusade in Constantinople in July 1203, but extending beyond the a text and ending (chronologically) with events that can be dated to ca. 1210. This special version of the last part of the *Historia* is characterised by the omission or condensation of many passages that are found in the a text, and a highly confused chronology of the events described. LO has many stylistic similarities with the b text and is closer to it up to 582.46, that is, the capture of Constantinople on 13 April 1204 and the end of the reign of Alexios V Doukas. However, from that point on (τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν; 583.2, the title of the last book) b has more in common with a (both in style and

¹⁴ van Dieten, “Introduction,” in *Historia*, 1:LVI–LVII (n. 4 above).

¹⁵ Ibid., 1:LXX–LXXXI.

narration), while some readings offered in b and a are missing in LO. Note, this version includes what has in the past often been regarded as a separate fragment and conventionally entitled *De statuis*, the famous description of the antique statues melted down by the crusaders in Constantinople.¹⁶

But there are manuscripts that resist clear classification, individual contaminated manuscripts such as A and W, and manuscripts in which a and b texts converge; and in manuscripts of all versions there are common errors. All this prevents us from reaching an unequivocal hypothesis concerning the origins of this highly complex textual tradition, and from explaining with certainty the interconnections and contradictions among the manuscripts. Although the editor admits that his stemma is partly hypothetical, he nevertheless reconstructs the following theory of the history of the composition of the text.

According to van Dieten, the original text (1–535.2, designated ζ by the editor), which has not survived, was written in Constantinople prior to 1204. It was copied at that time, perhaps by an intimate friend of the author, and in all likelihood formed the basis of the original P and W texts (i.e., those that contain version b). In Selymbria (April 1204–June 1206), Constantinople (July 1206–December 1206), and Nicaea (1207/8), Choniates wrote a continuation of the work (535.3–636, 647–655), which he circulated together with his theological work, *Panoplia Dogmatike*; that is, he sent a copy to an anonymous friend. This version has been preserved in LO (van Dieten designates the archetype π). In Nicaea, the author soon became aware of the inadequacies of his work and revised the whole text, paying particular attention to the final sections (583 onward). When unexpectedly a new opportunity opened up for him in the political arena, he abandoned his work and allowed it to be copied. This is how version b (archetype β) came about. However, because his hopes for the future were not realized and because he increasingly recognized that his work was a palliative portrait of the period, he revised the whole once again. “Perhaps he was already ill and could foresee his imminent death,” says van Dieten. This work has survived in version a (archetype α) and was unfinished at the time of the author’s death.¹⁷

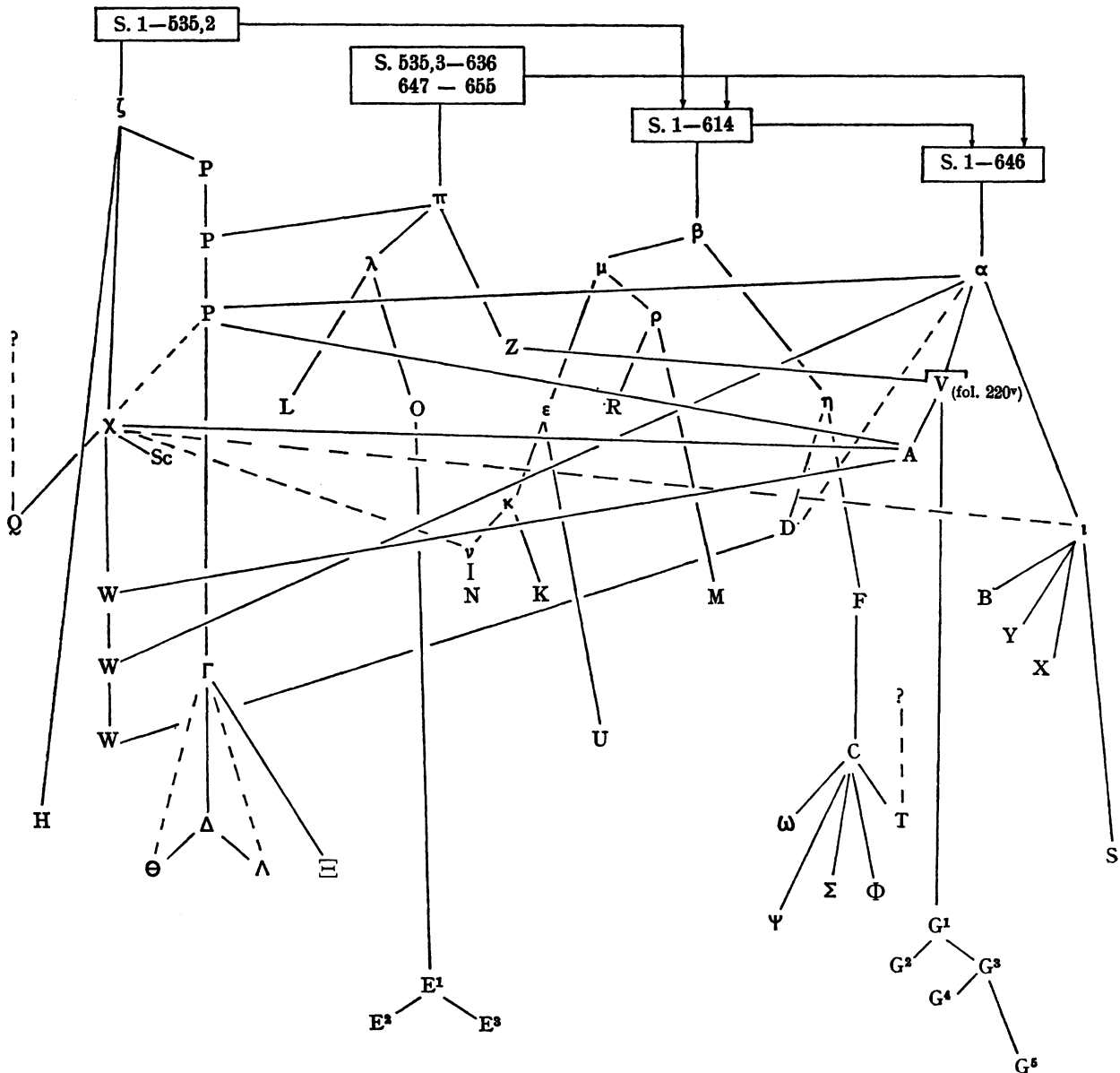
Thus, in van Dieten’s reconstruction the composition had five distinct phases: (1) 1–535.2 original version of b; (2) 1–535.2 b + 535.3–582.46 LO; (3) 1–535.2 b + 535.3–583.46 + 585.58–636.65 + 647, 1–655/65 LO from 535.3–655.65 provisionally revised; (4) 1–535.2 b + 535.3–614.7–10 b revised; (5) 1–646 version a.¹⁸ Below is a reproduction of van Dieten’s schematic representation of the textual tradition of the *Historia*.

16 Ibid., 1: XCV–XCVI.

17 Ibid., 1: C.

18 J.-L. van Dieten, “Niketas Choniates und codex Parisinus Graecus 1778,” *JÖB* 44 (1994): 57 n. 13.

Fig. 1 van Dieten's schematic representation of the textual tradition of the *Historia* (from van Dieten, introduction to Nicetae Choniatae, *Historia*, 1: CI).



The main text of van Dieten's edition follows version a, although in reconstructing this version the editor has preferred verified agreements between V & P-after-revision and V & b. The critical apparatus lists separately variant readings in individual manuscripts, variants in version b, and variants in version LO. Having three apparatus critici is very significant, for they allow the reader to observe virtually all the various stages of composition, from the initial drafts penned at the desk of Choniates to the final product that reached his readers roughly two decades later. As important and innovative as van Dieten's contribution is, there still exist unsolved problems concerning his theory of origins and tradition and especially his chronology of the different versions.¹⁹ More important, although the editor briefly mentions the circumstances of composition of the text in Nicaea, he does not examine them in detail and compare them with the circumstances of composition of the original text. Yet, the manuscript tradition of the *Historia* bears witness to a massive and elaborate "editorial" procedure that spanned decades and was influenced, if not defined by, the circumstances and purpose of the author at each distinctive phase of composition. Each version of the *Historia* merits separate investigation.

B(revior), Prior to 1204

In his introduction to the *Historia* van Dieten cites a series of passages that clearly indicate a date of composition prior to 1204:²⁰ 55.18–21: pirates "rule" the seas and harass the Roman maritime provinces in present times as a result of the ill-conceived naval policies of John II Komnenos; 114.17–20: a porphyry bowl that once stood outside the palace of Nikephoros Phokas now stands in a hall built by Manuel I Komnenos; 117.85–87: the looting of Asia Minor by the Turks, who have subjugated the territories of the empire; 124.13–14: Laodikeia had not at that time (ca. 1173) been as well fortified as it was now; 150.53–56: the fortresses of Neokastras in Asia Minor have a governor from Constantinople and contribute annual revenues to the treasury; 206.52–54: the emperors spent the summer in the palaces by the Propontis; 329.55–59: certain parts of Constantinople are now supplied by a water pipe whose construction was started by Andronikos

¹⁹ Some of these issues were raised in the review articles of van Dieten's edition. For example, Alexander Kazhdan pointed out that van Dieten's theory is in the first place too complex. Second, the position and role of the intermediate manuscripts (PW) is unclear: *BSI* 38 (1977): 54–56. J. Irigoin further questioned van Dieten's theory of origins, and especially the role of manuscript P: *REG* 91 (1978): 571–74. Van Dieten

responded to some of these objections in later years. See especially his "Parisinus Graecus," 49–58, where he argued convincingly against Irigoin's theory that MS P is either the autograph copy of the author or an exemplar of the work of Choniates' secretary, who was ordered to carry out the alterations of version a. See also R. Maisano's discussion on the multitude of variant readings evident in the textual transmission of the *Historia*:

"Varianti d'autore in Niceta Coniata?" in *Problemi di ecdotica e esegesi di testi bizantini e grecomedievali*, ed. R. Romano (Naples, 1994), 63–80.
²⁰ 1:XCII.

I Komnenos, but not yet completed by his successors; 352.1–2: the remains of the not-yet-fully-decomposed corpse of Andronikos I (d. 1185) could still be seen in a pit near the Ephoros cloister.

All these passages are significant, for if Choniates was writing after 1204, he would certainly not complain about the subjugation of Byzantine cities to the Turks in Asia Minor, nor about the rampant piracy that plagued the waters of the Aegean. The corpse of Andronikos I Komnenos would have been fully decomposed, and his successors would no longer be reigning in Constantinople.²¹ It is, however, Choniates' own testimony that confirms the pre-1204 date. In the preface to the *Historia*, he tells us that because he was not an eyewitness to the events he recorded for the reign of John II Komnenos, he set down what he heard from those contemporaries who knew the emperor personally, and who escorted him on military campaigns (4.73–81). These contemporaries could hardly have been alive after 1204, and even if they were, it cannot be inferred that they were readily available to provide Choniates with information either in Selymbria or Nicaea. However, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that the historian acquired information from the veterans of John II Komnenos's last military campaign in Syria (early 1140s) in the late 1180s or even the early 1190s.

Finally, Choniates himself reveals that he was still relatively young when he began working on the history.²² In his elaborately worked preface, Niketas feels compelled to justify his ambitious endeavor at such a young age: "for those things that old men, much older than Tithonos and three times the age of a crow, if they were still among the living, would have related to willing listeners, kindling the fires of

21 This suggests that Choniates was engaged in the composition of the *Historia* as early as the late 1180s, since the corpse of Andronikos was not yet fully decomposed. However, the evidence that will be presented here points overwhelmingly to a later date.

22 The date of Choniates' birth has long been the subject of controversy among scholars, with various opinions ranging from as early as 1150 to as late as 1160 (see V. Grecu, "Nicétas Choniates a-t-il connu l'histoire de Jean Kinnamos?" *REB* 7 [1949]: 195; G. Stadtmüller, "Zur biographie des Niketas Choniates [um 1150–um 1215]," *ByzF* 1 [1966]: 321; J.-L. van Dieten, *Niketas Choniates: Erläuterungen zu den Reden und Briefen nebst einer Biographie* [Berlin–New York, 1971], 18–20). The evidence derives mostly from the writings of Niketas and his elder brother, Michael Choniates. The latter

provides us with a precise terminus post quem of 1217 for the year of the historian's death (this has been securely established by V. Katsaros, "A Contribution to the Exact Dating of the Death of the Byzantine Historian Nicetas Choniates," *JÖB* 32.3 [1982]: 83–91), and this date helps us estimate the date of his birth. Yet, much confusion has arisen from the imprecise information available and from the rhetorical exaggeration that characterizes the scattered references to age. There are, however, clear indications for favoring a later date for his birth. First, Niketas testifies that when he was forced to flee Constantinople in April 1204 he carried on his shoulders his children who could not yet walk, and a male infant in his arms; his wife, too, was pregnant (*Historia* 588.35–37, 589.41). When Niketas died, Michael mourned his premature

death—he had not yet passed the threshold of old age—and lamented the fate of Niketas's orphaned children, who were still minors (Michael Choniates, *Μιχαήλ Ἀκομινάτου τοῦ Χωνιάτου τὰ σωζόμενα*, ed. S. Lampros, [Athens, 1879–80; repr. Groningen, 1968], 1:357.12, 359.23–25). Second, Niketas served as a subordinate tax official in the provinces before entering the ranks of the imperial administration in the position of undersecretary, which he held during the brief reign of Alexios II Komnenos (*ibid.*, 1:347.19–21). It therefore seems logical to assume that Niketas was in his early twenties when he was enrolled as imperial undersecretary, his early forties when tragedy struck in 1204, and his late fifties at the time of his untimely death, ca. 1217.

memory and stirring to life bygone deeds, the lover of history proposes to relate, even though he has not yet passed adolescence" (2.25–29). Choniates is, of course, speaking metaphorically of his actual age, but no doubt the historian indeed refers to himself. This can be corroborated by a hitherto-neglected remark made by Choniates' elder contemporary, Eustathios of Thessalonike. In his history of the capture of Thessalonike in 1185, this author refused to narrate the deeds of Andronikos I Komnenos because "hotter spirits would then find other words for them, it needs a young man's voice to tell of them, and even more than that, a well-developed ability to use language in a calculated way, so as to hit the target at which it is aimed."²³ Taken together, these two references seem to point to none other than Choniates himself.

A more precise pre-1204 date of composition was suggested by van Dieten, who concluded that Choniates began his work just before the overthrow of Andronikos I (12 September 1185), whose reign is referred to as tyrannical as early as 50.57–58. The bulk of the *Historia* was not, however, written before the accession of Alexios III (8 April 1195), who is mentioned as future emperor as early as 245.82–83.²⁴ This reference to Alexios III, which indicates that Choniates was writing the section from the reign of Alexios II Komnenos (1180–83) sometime after 1195, cannot be disputed. However, Andronikos's earlier mention as a tyrant does not substantially prove that Choniates was writing as early as 1185, since a later date could easily fit too.

Two references in books four and five of the reign of Manuel I Komnenos strongly suggest that Choniates was engaged in writing the history of this emperor sometime after 1197. The first concerns Manuel's war against the Serbian ruler Stefan Nemanja (1168). In relating this episode, Choniates seems to presuppose the resignation of Nemanja, which occurred on 25 March 1196: "[Manuel] had heard that the satrap of Serbia (*at that time* it was Stefan Nemanja) had become overly bold" (158.85–87). Had Nemanja still been in power, there would have been no need for such a clarification. The second passage concerns the blinding of Michael Sikidites, astrologer and sorcerer, at the command of Manuel I Komnenos. At this stage of the narrative Choniates tells us that Sikidites not only survived the punishment, but "after some time" went on to compose heretical treatises on the divine sacraments (149.32–

²³ Trans. J. Melville-Jones: Eustathios of Thessalonike, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, Byzantina Australiensia 8 (Canberra, 1988), 53. Eustathios's account was delivered as a Lenten sermon to the people of Thessalonike in February 1186. However, this does not necessarily mean that the account, in the form that it has reached us, was completed

at such an early date. E. Leone, "Conjectures sur la composition de 'La Prise de Thessalonique' d'Eustathe," *Byzantion* 34 (1964): 267–69, proposed a more complex form of composition: a much briefer version was composed and read at the beginning of Lent in 1186, which was later expanded and adorned with rhetorical enrichments.

He further argued that Eustathios could not have delivered such an address to his flock that would have taken as much as four hours to read, and in such a "high-style" language.

²⁴ van Dieten, "Introduction," 1:XCII (n. 4 above).

150.34).²⁵ This “after some time” refers to the period 1197–1200, when Sikidites’ doctrine gave rise to the theological disputes related in detail by Choniates in book two of the reign of Alexios III (514.38–517.4). Therefore, Choniates was writing book four of the reign of Manuel I after 1197 by the most conservative estimate.²⁶

An even more precise date of composition can be established from the title of the b text: τοῦ λογοθέτου τῶν σεκρέτων καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κρίσεων, γεγονότος δὲ καὶ ἐφόρου καὶ κριτοῦ τοῦ βήλου, γενικοῦ καὶ προκαθημένου τοῦ κοιτῶνος Νικήτα τοῦ Χωνιάτου ἱστορία ἀρχομένη ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ βασιλέως κύρ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ, τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως κύρ Ἀλεξίου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ. If this version is compared to the one found in the a text, χρονικὴ διήγησις τοῦ Χωνιάτου κύρ Νικήτα ἀρχομένη ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας Ἰωάννου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ καὶ λήγουσα μέχρι τῆς ἀλώσεως τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, some important differences can be immediately observed. First, while the title of b has only a beginning—ἀρχομένη—the title of a has both a beginning and an end—ἀρχομένη καὶ λήγουσα. Second, the ἱστορία of version b becomes χρονικὴ διήγησις in version a. Finally, while in the b text Choniates provides us with a full array of his illustrious offices in government, in the title of the a text this is no longer the case.

We should not attach much significance to the change in terminology for Choniates’ history, for in the mind of contemporaries, the terms ἱστορία and χρονικὴ διήγησις were essentially identical.²⁷ However, the fact that the title of version b does not mention an end point could perhaps be attributed to the circumstances at the time of composition, that is, Choniates was in the midst of an imperial reign that he planned to narrate. The most important of the changes made to the title of the *Historia* concern the offices held by Choniates. Since the highest and thus latest in date, the *logothetes ton sekreton*, appears in version b, it is logical to assume that Choniates was writing after his promotion to this post. According to Hans-Georg Beck, the earliest possible date that Choniates could have been appointed to this post is after the death of his predecessor John Kastamonites, circa 1192.²⁸ A more precise date was offered by van Dieten, who argued that Choniates became *logothetes ton sekreton* around the mid-1190s. He added that the historian

25 The identification of Sikidites with Michael Glykas was made long ago by K. Krumbacher, “Michael Glykas, eine Skizze seiner Biographie und seiner litterarischen Thätigkeit nebst einem unedierten Gedichte und Briefe desselben,” *SBMünch* 3 (1894): 391–460. See also H. G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 343.

26 It should be here noted that van Dieten,

“Introduction,” 1:XCII, has suggested that the first book, dealing with the reign of John II Komnenos, was written after the next seven books, which deal with the reign of Manuel I Komnenos. This is indicated, for example, by the detailed introduction of John Axouch in book 1 of Manuel I (48.5–6), who had already been introduced in similar terms in book 1 of John II (9.23ff.). See also Maisano, notes to Kazhdan et al., *Narrazione cronologica*, 1:

LXXX (n. 12 above), who strengthens van Dieten’s hypothesis with similar references.

27 Maisano, “Commentary to Niceta Coniata,” in Kazhdan et al., *Narrazione cronologica*, 1:509, n. 1.

28 “Der byzantinische Ministerpräsident,” *BZ* 48 (1955): 325.

probably received this office from Isaac II Angelos rather than from his successor, Alexios III Angelos, who ascended the throne by a coup d'état in April 1195.²⁹

Neither conclusion appears to be correct. In a letter dated 1194.95, Michael Choniates refers to Niketas' brother-in-law, John Belissariotes, as *megas logothetes*.³⁰ In an official document dated 1196, Belissariotes is designated as *logothetes ton sekreton* and *megas logariastes*.³¹ At the end of the twelfth century the titles *megas logothetes* and *logothetes ton sekreton* were virtually synonymous.³² Therefore, John Belissariotes, and not Niketas Choniates, was Kastamonites' immediate successor to the post. Moreover, in two official documents of November 1197, Belissariotes is no longer *logothetes ton sekreton*, but designated only by the title *megas logariastes*.³³ It is thus likely that Alexios III Angelos promoted Choniates to the post of *logothetes ton sekreton* in 1196.97.

The commencement of the composition of the *Historia* should also be dated to around that time. This is indicated by Michael Choniates' single surviving letter to his brother, dated circa 1194/95. On this occasion Michael, the metropolitan of Athens, addresses Niketas as *epi ton kriseon*, and replies to his brother's many requests for all Michael's written works in one volume.³⁴ Since Niketas greatly utilized Michael's works in composing the *Historia*, we can assume that at this stage he was still collecting material for the text.³⁵ Thus, Choniates began working on the *Historia* only during the reign of Alexios III Angelos and probably shortly after his promotion to the post of *logothetes ton sekreton*.

This is in turn closely connected to the circumstances of the original composition. In his introduction, van Dieten notes the remarkable difference between versions b and a specifically in the discussion of the reign of Alexios III. Version a is significantly longer, more comprehensive, more critical, and more detailed. Many episodes are completely missing in the b text. For those episodes that appear in both versions, more information is provided in a. According to van Dieten, these differences become understandable only if one assumes that b notes the events almost as they occur, while a, which was written later,

29 *Biographie*, 38–39 (n. 22 above).

30 *Michaelis Choniatae epistulae*, ed. F. Kolovou, CFHB 41 (Berlin–New York, 2001), 73–74.

31 *Actes de Lavra*, ed. P. Lemerle et al. (Paris, 1970), 1:67–68; P. Lemerle, "Notes sur l'administration byzantine à la veille de la IV^e croisade d'après deux documents inédits des archives de Lavra," *REB* 19 (1961): 259, repr. in *Le monde de Byzance: Histoire et Institutions* (London, 1978).

32 van Dieten, *Biographie*, 37 n. 48.

See also R. Guiland, "Les Logothètes: Études sur l'histoire administrative de l'empire byzantin," *REB* 29 (1971): 79–84.

33 MM 4:139–41.

34 *Michaelis Choniatae epistulae* 1.3–4.

35 See Lampros, *Michael Choniates*, 1:μν'–ν', 2:548–49; G. Stadtmüller, *Michael Choniates: Metropolit von Athen (ca. 1138–ca. 1222)* (Rome, 1934), 224–34; van Dieten, *Biographie*, 35–36; F. Kolovou, *Μιχαήλ*

Χωνιάτης: Συμβολή στη μελέτη του βίου και του έργου του; *To Corpus επιστολών* (Athens, 1999), 172ff.; A. Rhoby, "Beobachtungen zu einigen Textstellen im Geschichtswerk des Niketas Choniates," *BZ* 95 (2002): 87–90.

is influenced by changes in judgment and living circumstances.³⁶ Yet Choniates' discussion of the reign of Alexios III in version b is almost completely uncritical and in most cases can be viewed as favorable to the regime. The most characteristic examples of Choniates' attitude to this emperor in the b text are the episodes of Alexios's usurpation of the throne in 1195 (453.3ff.), the expedition against the rebel Dobromir Chrysos in 1196/97 (502.10ff.), the diplomatic exchanges with the German emperor Henry VI (477.66–479.46), and Alexios's flight from the capital in July 1203 (545.51ff.). In these episodes, the reader is confronted not merely with a difference of interpretation but more importantly with significant factual discrepancies.³⁷ These cannot be explained merely by changes in judgment and living circumstances, or even information newly discovered long after the event, as it is blatantly obvious that in version b the historian often concealed information potentially damaging for the emperor. But it can be explained if we assume that at the time Choniates was writing the original version, he either did not deem it expedient to criticise the reigning emperor, or had, in fact, undertaken the task under the auspices of the regime or a patron closely connected to the imperial family or court.

That Alexios III was the reigning emperor at the time of the original composition can be confirmed: the only time in the entire text that Choniates refers to the "present emperor," he refers to Alexios III. When the historian relates the rebuilding of the ancient underground aqueduct in Constantinople by Andronikos I, he tells us that this project had not been completed due to Andronikos's removal: "so much were those who ruled after him—those at least who rule until now—concerned to bring this work of communal benefit to completion, that Isaac, who removed him from power as well as from life, destroyed the tower along with the most delightful dwellings, as if in envy toward Andronikos for this most noble deed" (329.58–330.63). Although Choniates is being ironic about the unconcern of *both* of Andronikos's successors—"those who ruled after him" and "those who rule until now"—he criticizes only Isaac explicitly. The phrase "those who rule until now" can refer to none other than Alexios III.

Choniates' history was originally a history of imperial reigns, clearly continuing from the point where previous historians had ended (4.66–69), and designed at its inception to narrate the reigns of the Komnenian emperors. When Alexios III assumed the throne he

36 van Dieten, "Introduction," 1: XCIV–XCV. Van Dieten probably meant that Choniates' account in version a was influenced by the events of 1204, and also by his own impoverished condition in Nicaea.

37 A detailed analysis of the revised passages will be undertaken in my future publication.

changed his name from Angelos to Komnenos, yet this is not stated in the b text (459.53–64 VAP). Instead, the title of book one of Alexios's reign in this version reads: βασιλεία τοῦ βασιλέως κύρ Ἀλεξίου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ (453.1–2 b). Although criticism of the previous Komnenian rulers is not completely missing in the b text, this criticism is only latent, if at all present, in the original version of the *Historia*. Yet the tendency to eulogize the reigning emperor was common enough in Byzantium and especially so when the majority of the writers belonged to the imperial court circle. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, historical writing centered at the imperial court in Constantinople. Michael Psellos, a major political figure of the eleventh century, ended his *Chronographia* with a eulogy of Michael VII Doukas. Michael Attaleiates, a high legal official, dedicated his history to Nikephoros III Botaneiates. The caesar Nikephoros Bryennios undertook his history at the behest of Eirene Doukaina, wife of Alexios I, and Constantine Manasses wrote his popular verse chronicle at the request of Eirene, wife of the *sebastokrator* Andronikos Komnenos.³⁸

Like his predecessors, Choniates was intimately connected to the imperial court, serving as one of the highest officials in the administration of Alexios III. He remained logothetes ton sekreton and head of the senate until dismissed by the new emperor, Alexios V Doukas, in 1204 (565.11–15). As is evident from his correspondence, Choniates was also connected to several prominent officials serving alongside him in the administration. Especially significant is the author's relationship to Basil Kamateros, brother of Empress Euphrosyne Kamatera and uncle to Theodore I Laskaris of Nicaea. This highly influential figure was a recipient of a number of Choniates' letters, which strongly indicate a patron-client relationship.³⁹ One of those letters (no. 11 in Choniates' collection) served as a cover letter for a revision of part of the author's other major work, the *Panoplia Dogmatike*, book seventeen, dealing with the heresy of the Armenians.⁴⁰ It is equally significant that Constantine Mesopotamites, a high-ranking governmental official in the 1180s and 1190s and later metropolitan of Thessalonike (1196/97–1227) as well as a recipient of Choniates' letters, was also the owner of manuscript L (Laurentianus IX 24, thirteenth century) of the LO version of the *Historia*.⁴¹ Finally, Theodore Eirenikos, who succeeded to Mesopotamites' position in the administration of Alexios

38 See discussion in K. Snipes, "The Chronographia of Michael Psellos and the Textual Tradition and Transmission of the Byzantine Historians of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *ZRV* 27–28 (1989): 43–71.

39 *Nicetae Choniatae, orationes et epistulae*,

ed. J.-L. van Dieten, CFHB 3 (Berlin–New York, 1972), 202–3, 209–11, 216–17.

40 F. Cavallera, "Le Trésor de la Foi Orthodoxe de Nicéas Acominatos," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique publié par l'Institut de Toulouse* 5 (1913): 124–37; van Dieten, *Biographie*, 181ff.

41 Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 204–6, 214. The identification was made by R. Walter in *Gnomon* 50 (1978): 539.

III and later became patriarch in exile at Nicaea (1214–1216), was also Choniates' colleague and later correspondent in Nicaea.⁴² As we shall see, it is certainly not coincidental that these individuals were conspicuously absent from Choniates' discussion of political affairs in version b, but criticized on numerous occasions in version a.

Virtually next to nothing is known of Choniates' relationship with Alexios III, since the author totally excludes any discussion of himself as a participant in the events of Alexios's reign. On the other hand, he conspicuously appears with an active role during the reign of Isaac II when, in his capacity of governor of Philippopolis, he received a set of contradictory orders from the emperor (402.49–55), and came into personal conflict with him over the mishandling of the passage of the Third Crusade (410.55ff.). However, it is unlikely that the logothetes ton sekreton and head of the senate was not closely involved in the affairs of the state during the reign of Alexios III, and it could very well be that Choniates portrayed himself in opposition to Isaac II to elicit the approval of Alexios III and his intimate circle. Indeed, it appears that the *Historia* in its original form was not written on the personal initiative of the author, but rather upon the request of the court circle of Alexios III.

It cannot be overstressed that in an authoritarian society such as Byzantium a writer's work came under the dual pressure of secular and clerical authorities.⁴³ Freedom of expression needed to be veiled under complex rhetorical constructions, ancient and biblical allusions, and fictitious speeches. These were not merely rhetorical devices blindly copied from the great masters of antiquity, as has so often been mistakenly assumed, but often served as tools of expression and criticism.⁴⁴ In the case of Choniates, we are confronted with a writer who was at the same time a prominent government official, and not a secluded monk retired from active political life and writing in the safe haven provided by the walls of a monastery.⁴⁵ The historian was undoubtedly heavily dependent on imperial favor for his livelihood. Thus, freedom of expression was not an option—it would lead to a political death sentence.

Cases similar to that of Choniates can be found throughout the course of Byzantine history. The most obvious example is that of the sixth-century author Procopius, who wrote a corrective to his

⁴² Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 206–8, 211–14.

⁴³ See discussions in Ia. N. Liubarskii, "Writer's Intrusion in Early Byzantine Literature," in *XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies: Major Papers* (Moscow, 1991), 433ff. A. Kazhdan, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1982),

96–116; R. Macrides, "The Historian in the History," *Φιλέλλην: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning*, ed. C. Constantinides et al. (Venice, 1996), 205–24.

⁴⁴ On veiled criticism under rhetorical expressions see A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Michael Psellos' Chronographia* (Leiden, 1999) and *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny,*

History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity (Philadelphia, 2004). On indirect criticism by Choniates, see Liubarskii, "Byzantine Irony," 233ff. (n. 3 above).

⁴⁵ As was, for example, John Zonaras; see remarks of P. Magdalino, "Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*," *Speculum* 58 (1983): 333.

epic work, the *Wars* (covering the period 527–553/54). According to Procopius, the *Anecdota* or *Secret History* was written to provide the “real” explanations for events and to reveal what had hitherto been concealed in the *Wars*.⁴⁶ The author further claims that it was not possible for him to publish the work “as long as the actors were still alive.... For neither was it possible to elude the vigilance of multitudes of spies, nor if detected, to escape a most cruel death.”⁴⁷ The eleventh-century court rhetorician, teacher, and later metropolitan of Euchaita, John Mauropous, has left us a poem that strongly insinuates that he was forced to abandon his own historical work because he refused to lie: “The author has never yet told a lie, but even if he were to lie in the rest of the work in the manner that those who commissioned it would like, with whose praises the book revels, this is still insufficient, for the desire of the powerful for eulogy is insatiable. Therefore let these [praises] be left for encomia; let the writer not allow the writing to proceed any further, for it lacks the natural ability to lie.”⁴⁸ Such a historical work has not come down to us, but some scholars have argued that it was destroyed because the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos was not pleased with it.⁴⁹

The case of Mauropous’s pupil, Michael Psellos, is even more interesting. Psellos’s main historical work, the *Chronographia*, was composed in two main stages, the first from the reign of Basil II to the abdication of Isaac I Komnenos in 1059, and the second from Constantine X to Michael VII in 1078. The inconsistency between the two sections is most apparent in the highly eulogistic account of the reign of Michael VII Doukas, which, when compared to the critical viewpoint from which Psellos assesses previous emperors, is remarkably different. To account for this discrepancy, modern scholars have concluded that the author undertook to write the final section at the request of the emperors Constantine X and Michael VII, if not under their active supervision. This was then appended to the first part of the *Chronographia* after the author’s death.⁵⁰

46 Procopius, *The Anecdota or Secret History*, trans. H. B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1935), 3. For Procopius and the *Anecdota*, see A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1985), 49–83; K. Adshead, “The Secret History of Procopius and Its Genesis,” *Byzantion* 63 (1993): 5–28; G. Greatrex, “The Dates of Procopius’ Works,” *BMGS* 18 (1994): 101–14.

47 *Anecdota* 3, trans. Dewing.

48 John Mauropous, poem 96, ed. P. de Lagarde, “Iohannis Euchaitorum metro-

politae quae in Codice Vaticano graeco 676 supersunt,” *AbhGött, Philol.-hist.Kl.* (Göttingen, 1882; repr. Amsterdam, 1979), 50: ὁ συγγραφεὺς ψεύδος μὲν οὐκ εἰρηκέ πω, / ψεύσαιτο μέντ’ ἂν ἐν γε τοῖς λοιποῖς λόγοις, / οὕτω φιλοῦντων τῶν κελευόντων τάδε, / ὧν τοῖς ἐπαίνοις ἐντροφῶν τὸ βιβλίον, / ὅμως ἐδοξεν ἐνδεέστερον λέγειν. / ἐξουσία κρότων γὰρ οὐκ οἶδεν κόρον. / οὐκοῦν ἀφείσθω ταῦτα τοῖς ἐγκωμοῖς, / ἢ συγγραφή δὲ μὴ προχωρεῖτω πλέον. / οὐκ εὐφυῶς γὰρ πρὸς τὰ τοῦ ψεύδους ἔχει.

49 “Mauropous, John,” *ODB* 2:1319.

50 See discussions in J. M. Hussey, “Michael Psellus, the Byzantine Historian,” *Speculum* 10 (1935): 81–90; R. Anastasi, *Studi sulla “Chronographia” di Michele Psello* (Catania, 1969); E. Kriaras, “Considerazioni sul libro VII della ‘Chronographia’ di Michele Psello,” *Orpheus* 6 (1985): 370–95; M. Agati, “Michele VII Parapinace e la ‘Chronographia’ di Psello,” *Bolletino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 45 (1991): 11–31.

To resume our discussion of Choniates, from 535.3 onward his work can have been written only after 1204, as it is at this point that Choniates begins to narrate the events of the Fourth Crusade. Van Dieten has shown that the narration had reached the year 1202, when the author was forced to flee the city in April 1204.⁵¹ This is clearly evident in the b text, where there is no prelude introducing the imminent calamity. The last events recorded prior to the arrival of the Fourth Crusade were the triumphant victories of Alexios III over the rebels John Spyridonakes and Dobromir Chrysos (1202). After this section Choniates adds a preliminary note to the ensuing text to prepare the reader for what will follow, but clearly there is no continuity and in fact manuscripts RMF of the b-family label this section as book three of the reign of Alexios III (535.3).

Following the events of 1204, the author, now a refugee, took his historical work with him and continued to write in exile in Selymbria and Nicaea. According to his own testimony, Choniates stayed in Selymbria from April 1204 to June 1206, when he was once again forced to flee, due to the devastating incursions of the Cumans, this time returning to Constantinople for six months (July–December 1206) before “sailing to the east” (635.95–97 LO addendum line 3). Choniates, therefore, must have arrived at Nicaea in December 1206/January 1207, and during his time in the Bithynian capital (from his arrival in 1207 until his death in ca. 1217) the *Historia* was elaborately revised and significantly expanded. For the final section of the work (535.3 onward) there exist three text versions: b, a, and LO. According to van Dieten, LO is the oldest.

Laurentianus IX and Oxoniensis Bodleianus Roe 22

The LO version, beginning with the events of the Fourth Crusade and ending with the description of the statues melted down by the crusaders in Constantinople (535.3–636 + 647–655), has survived in its entirety in two manuscripts: Laurentianus IX 24 (thirteenth century) and Oxoniensis Bodleianus Roe 22 (dated 1286). As mentioned above, it has been transmitted with the *Panoplia Dogmatike*, and continues directly from the latter without a title.⁵² In van Dieten’s view, Choniates wrote LO while in Selymbria and Constantinople, and finished it in Nicaea around 1207/8. He then circulated it together with the *Panoplia Dogmatike*, i.e., he sent copies of both works to an anonymous friend who had asked for it.⁵³ The author, however, soon realised the inadequacies of the continuation of his work and began to revise it, particularly from 535 onward, resulting in the version that we now refer to as b(revior).

Concerning LO, internal evidence contradicts a date of composition as early as 1207/8. Since LO has come down to us together with

51 “Introduction,” I: XCIII (n. 14 above).

52 Ibid., I: LVII.

53 Ibid., I: XCI. See preface of the *Panoplia Dogmatike* in J.-L. van Dieten, *Zur Überlieferung und Veröffentlichung der Panoplia Dogmatike des Niketas Choniates* (Amsterdam, 1970), 57.20.

the *Panoplia*, it can be assumed that they were written around the same time. In the preface to his theological work Choniates complains bitterly about his miserable situation in Nicaea: “I can barely provide nourishment for my own party and the young servants under me, as I am dwelling in a foreign land, Nicaea the metropolis of Bithynia, building wooden houses and living the remainder of my life as a wretched refugee and a miserable stranger.”⁵⁴ Similar sentiments are voiced in the LO version, where Choniates tells us that he is residing amid appalling conditions alongside Lake Askania, receiving scarcely enough aid from the authorities and being maltreated by the local population.⁵⁵ That both the *Panoplia* and LO were written in Nicaea is clear enough, but only the historical events reported in the LO version can tell us exactly when. Although it has already been noted that chronologically LO goes beyond both the b and the a text, the extent of time LO covers has been underestimated.

In the aftermath of the capture of Constantinople and the partitioning of the empire, Choniates recognized three leaders of the resistance against the Latins: Theodore I Laskaris in Asia Minor, Leo Sgouros in central Greece, and Michael Komnenos Doukas in Epiros.⁵⁶ Having related the progress of the Latin conquest both in Greece and in the Asian part of the empire, Choniates lists the three leaders of resistance. He devotes three lines to Theodore Laskaris, who is introduced as a relative of Alexios III, and tells us that he was proclaimed emperor by the cities of the East, an event that occurred in 1205 (626.53–56).⁵⁷ Concerning Michael Komnenos Doukas, the historian says, “and there was another [leader], son of the sebastokrator John, who was the uncle of Isaac and Alexios, the emperors of the Romans, on their father’s side, and ruled the area around Nikopolis and the river Acheloos. He did not act in a cowardly manner toward the Latins but rather bravely engaged them when they sailed to Dyrrachion and proceeded ahead. Because they lacked the necessary supplies and because he surprised

54 van Dieten, *Panoplia Dogmatike*, 57.16–19: ὡς μόλις τὴν συνοδίαν καὶ τὰ ὑπουργὰ μοι παιδάρια διατρέφειν δύναμαι ἐν γῇ παροικῶν ἀλλοτρίᾳ καὶ πρὸς τῇ μητρόπολει Βιθυνίας Νικαίᾳ πηξάμενος μόσυνα καὶ τὸ λείπον τοῦ βίου διατοξεύων ὡς ἀρχεῖος μετανάστης καὶ ἀμέγαρτος ἐπηλύς.

55 Choniates, *Historia* 635.1 LO addendum lines 4–9: ὁθεν καὶ παροικοῦμεν ἐν τῇ κατὰ τὴν λίμνην τὴν Ἀσκανίαν Νικαίᾳ τῆς τῶν Βιθυνῶν ἐπαρχίας προεδρευούσῃ...πλὴν οὐδὲν ἄμεινον τὰ τῆς τοπικῆς ταυτησὶ μεταβάσεως τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς εἰσήνεγκαν πράγμασιν, ἀλλ’ ἐσμὲν καὶ πάλιν ταῖς λύπαις ὑπέραντλοι καὶ μόνῳ διεξαγόμεθα θεῷ βραχείας τῆς ἐξ

ἀνθρώπων εὐμοιροῦντες συνάρσεως.

56 For Theodore I Laskaris, founder of the empire of Nicaea, see A. Meliarakes, *Ιστορία τοῦ βασιλείου τῆς Νικαίας καὶ τοῦ Δεσποτάτου τῆς Ἠπείρου* (Athens, 1898; repr. 1994), 1–154; A. Gardner, *The Lascarids of Nicaea: The Story of an Empire in Exile* (London, 1912; repr. 1964), 52–115; and ODB 3:2039–40. For Leo Sgouros, see, most recently, F. Vlachopoulou, *Λέων Σγουρός. Ο Βίος καὶ ἡ Πολιτεία τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ ἀρχοντα τῆς βορειανατολικῆς Πελοποννήσου στὶς ἀρχές τοῦ 13ου αἰῶνα* (Thessalonike 2002). For Michael Komnenos Doukas, see L. Stiernon, “Les Origines du despotat d’Épire,” *REB* 27

(1959): 90–126; D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London, 1968), 91ff.; K. Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν* (Thessalonike, 1984), 2:548–637, 669–89.

57 For the date see P. B. Sinogowitz, “Über das byzantinische Kaisertum nach dem vierten Kreuzzuge, 1204–1205,” *BZ* 45 (1952): 344–56; P. Gounarides, “Ἡ Χρονολογία τῆς Αναγόρευσης καὶ τῆς στέψης τοῦ Θεοδώρου Α’ τοῦ Λασκάρεως,” *Σύμμεικτα* 6 (1985): 69.

them in frontal attack, he won a great victory and prevailed against many thousands, as many as the bishop of Saisos had recruited from Italy and gathered from all the Latin lands to be shipped to the borders of the Romans” (631.16ff. LO).⁵⁸

By “the bishop of Saisos,” Choniates means Nivelon de Chérisy, bishop of Soissons (ca. 1176–1207) and chief prelate of the army of the Fourth Crusade.⁵⁹ In 1205 Nivelon was named archbishop of Thessalonike and granted a special papal license to remain simultaneously bishop of Soissons. When the Latins were defeated at Adrianople (March–April 1205), Nivelon was sent back to the West to seek reinforcements. He died in Apulia in 1207, still laboring to return to Greece with the enlisted soldiers he had recruited.⁶⁰ From Choniates’ description it appears that the Latins managed to raise a substantial force, which was sent to the east, only to be cut down by the Greeks of Epiros. The battle described cannot be correlated with any that are known to us through other sources, and this is not surprising considering that the history of the Byzantine separatist state of Epiros is so poorly documented.⁶¹ However, this battle can be dated only to after 1207, but not much later, since by then the forces that the bishop of Soissons had enlisted seem to have been already assembled.

The career of the third Greek leader, Leo Sgouros, receives detailed treatment by the historian, who ends this section by relating the death of Sgouros together with the capture of Akrokorinth by the Latins. Choniates further informs us that after these events Sgouros’s wife was sent to the east (i.e., to Nicaea) and that at the “present time” Nauplion was held by a certain Gabriel, a relative who appears to have been Sgouros’s brother (611.30–35 LO).⁶² The death of Sgouros is generally agreed to have taken place in 1208, probably in the second part of that year.⁶³ Akrokorinth capitulated to the Latins in 1209, and Nauplion, in

58 ἄλλος δέ τις ἐξ ὁσφύος φῦς Ἰωάννου τοῦ σεβαστοκράτορος, ὅστις θεῖος ἦν πρὸς πατρός Ἰσαακίου καὶ Ἀλεξίου τῶν ὁμογνίων αὐτοκρατόρων Ῥωμαίων, τὰ περὶ Νικόπολιν χειρίζων καὶ τὸν ποταμὸν Ἀχελῶον, οὐδὲ οὗτος ἀγεννῶς ἀντεφέρετο τοῖς Λατίνοις ἀλλὰ καὶ μάλα γενναίως, καταχθίσιν εἰς τὸ Δυρράχιον καὶ χωροῦσιν ἐς τὰ πρόσω· πῇ μὲν σπάνει τῶν ἀναγκαίων, πῇ δὲ καὶ ἐνωπίῳ μάχῃ τὴν νίκην λαμπρὰ ἀνεδήσατο καὶ πολλὰς κατηγωνίσατο χιλιάδας, ὅσας ὁ Σαيسου ἐπίσκοπος ἐξ Ἰταλίας στρατολογήσας καὶ ὅπῃ δὴ Λατινικῶν μερῶν συλλεξάμενος εἰς τὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὄρια διεπλώσατο.

59 On Nivelon de Chérisy, see A. J. Andrea, *Contemporary Sources for the Fourth Crusade* (Leiden, 2000), 223–38:

“Concerning the Land of Jerusalem and the Means by Which Relics Were Carried to This Church from the City of Constantinople,” by the Anonymous of Soissons.

60 Andrea, *Fourth Crusade*, 225.

61 A fleet from Venice had landed in Dyrrachion in the spring of 1205 and captured the stronghold. The Venetians retained Dyrrachion until they capitulated to an attack by Michael Komnenos Doukas around 1210 to 1215. See Meliarakes, *Ιστορία*, 55–57 (n. 56 above); D. M. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros (1204–1267)* (Oxford, 1957), 37–38.

62 ὥς δὲ μετὰ καιρὸν ἐτεθνήκει, ἐγκρατεῖς παρὰ δόξαν Λατίνοι καὶ τοῦ Ἀκροκορίνθου γίνονται. τῷ τοι καὶ ἡ τούτου σύζυγος φαμένη χαίρειν ταῖς ἐκείσε διατριβαῖς ἐς τὴν ἔω

διαπλῶζεται. καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ὡς ἱστὸς ἐπ’ ὄρους καὶ σημαία ἐπὶ βουνοῦ τὸ Ναύπλιον παρὰ τινος Γαβριήλ, κασιγνήτου τοῦ Σγουροῦ, κατεχόμενον.

63 See J. Longnon, *L’empire Latin de Constantinople et la Principauté de Morée* (Paris, 1949), 92; A. Bon, *La Morée franque: Recherches historiques, topographiques et archéologiques sur la Principauté d’Achaïe, 1204–1430* (Paris, 1969), 1:68; J. Hoffmann, *Rudimente von Territorialstaaten im byzantinischen Reich (1071–1210): Untersuchungen über Unabhängigkeitsbestrebungen und ihr Verhältnis zu Kaiser und Reich* (Munich, 1974), 59; A. Savvides, “A Note on the Death of Leo Sgurus in AD 1208,” *BMGS* 12 (1988): 289–95.

1210/11.⁶⁴ Therefore the composition of this passage should be dated to no earlier than circa 1210. Consequently this provides a terminus post quem for the composition of LO, which in all likelihood was written around 1210 to 1215. This raises certain problems concerning the chronology of the versions of the text after 1204 as well the inadequacies displayed by LO.

The relation of LO to both the b and the a texts is highly problematic, as this version displays certain characteristics that clearly distinguish it from both the b and the a texts, and at the same time make it extremely difficult to integrate in reconstructions of the revision process. The mere fact that LO has come to us together with the *Panoplia Dogmatike* differentiates this version from the *Historia* as it has survived in the a and b versions. LO begins with the arrival of the fleet of the Fourth Crusade at Constantinople in June 1203 with the phrase: ἐνταῦθα ἡ ἄλωσις τῆς πόλεως καὶ τινὰ τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα συμβάντων, and then picks up on the first sentence found in the b and a texts (535.3 LO). In versions b and a, the arrival of the fleet occurs in the middle of book two of the reign of Alexios III, where it is simply part of the narration. The second reign of Isaac II Angelos together with his son Alexios IV, as well as that of Alexios V, are related in two different books in the b and a texts, and accorded the appropriate titles. In the LO version, no such titles are found (549.1–3, 565.1–3 LO). The final section of the work, dealing with events after the fall of Constantinople, has a title in all three versions but, while in the b and a texts this is more or less similar, focusing on “events after the fall,” in LO it is recorded in the margin simply as τόμος δεύτερος (583.1–3 LO). Moreover, the long and eloquent introduction of this section of the work in the b and a texts is missing in LO, where the author begins merely by stating: εἶχε μὲν οὕτω ταῦτα, καὶ ἡ Κωνσταντίνου καλλιπολις (583.4–585.57, 585.58 LO). Finally, the *De statu* fragment is again accorded its own title in V, but not in LO, where it simply forms the last part of its book two (647.1–3 LO).

One of the most curious features of LO—besides its size and its beginning in 1203—is the chronological order of the events described. In the van Dieten edition LO follows this sequence: 585.58–603.23, 612.36–627.84, 631.17–636.65, 628.15–631.16, 605.65–608.50, 604.53–59, 608.50–611.30–35, 647–55.⁶⁵ This sequence of events leads to a great deal of chronological confusion. For example, the events in Greece after the conquest of Constantinople until about February 1205 are narrated in LO, but only after the events in Asia Minor and Thrace from 1206 to 1207 have been recorded (605.65ff.). The siege of Didymoteichos and the death of Patriarch John X Kamateros, May/June 1206 and 26 June respectively, and also the siege of Adrianople in 1207 are placed in LO before the battle of Rhousion and the conquest of Apros in February/March 1206 (632.22ff., 636.22ff., 628.15ff.).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Longnon, *L'empire*, 240; M. Kordoses, “Ιστορικά και τοπογραφικά προβλήματα κατά τις πολεμικές συγκρούσεις της πρώτης περιόδου της Φραγκοκρατίας στη Νότια Ελλάδα (1204–1262),” *Ιστοριογεωγραφικά* 1 (1985–86): 118–27.

⁶⁵ van Dieten, “Introduction,” 1:XXVI.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1:XCVII.

In addition to this chronological confusion, notice the lack of information on Constantinople and Asia Minor. Regarding Theodore I Laskaris, the only information that Choniates offers us is that the son-in-law of Alexios III was recognized as emperor in Asia Minor (631ff. LO). Neither Manuel Mavrozomes nor the Komnenoi of Trebizond are so much as mentioned in LO.⁶⁷ Moreover, only toward the end of the work does the author refer to Constantinople, but here again he narrates events in almost reverse chronological order.⁶⁸ Van Dieten attempts to explain these deficiencies with reference to the author's circumstances at the time of composition: when Choniates began writing LO in Selymbria, he had only one source of information and thus restricted himself to events in Thrace and Macedonia. His move to Nicaea at about the end of 1206/beginning of 1207 enabled him to receive information about Greece from his brother, Michael. The fact that he does not dwell on events in Asia Minor may be explained by the wealth of information he was receiving about Greece.⁶⁹

This hypothesis can hardly be plausible. For it to stand, one has to assume first that Choniates could not receive information from his brother in Selymbria (why not?), and second that he later simply ignored the eastern part of the empire to concentrate on Greece. In a more recent article, van Dieten adds that the chronological confusion in LO could also have originated from an error of transmission (i.e., the changes that Choniates had indicated when he revised the archetype were not clear and thus the copyist followed the old chronological order).⁷⁰ This seems a more reasonable explanation for the problematic chronology. It does not, however, explain the reason for the neglect of Theodore I Laskaris and Asia Minor, which is significant in understanding the LO version.

This omission can in the first place be explained if we view LO as an epitome of the events occurring after the arrival of the Fourth Crusade. That Choniates intended LO to be an epitome can be confirmed by the opening lines of this version: ἡ ἄλωσις τῆς πόλεως καὶ τινὰ τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα συμβάντων. If we compare this to the title of b, ἱστορία τῶν μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν συμβάντων, or even a, τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως συμβάντα, we immediately realize that Choniates never planned LO to be a detailed account of events, but merely a

67 See "Maurozomes," *ODB* 2:1319–20; A. Savvides, *Βυζαντινά στασιαστικά και αυτονομιστικά κινήματα στα Δωδεκάνησα και στη Μικρά Ασία, 1189–ca. 1240 μ.Χ.* (Athens, 1987), 231–45. For the Komnenoi of Trebizond, see A. Vasiliev, "The Foundation of the Empire of Trebizond (1204–1222)," *Speculum* 11 (1936): 3–37; A. Savvides, "Οι

Μεγάλοι Κομνηνοί του Πόντου και οι Σελτζούκοι του Ρούμ (Ικονίου) την περίοδο 1205/6–1222," *Αρχ.Πόντ.* 39 (1984): 169–93; idem, *Κινήματα*, 260–300.

68 van Dieten, "Introduction," 1:XCVII.

69 Ibid.

70 van Dieten, "Parisinus Graecus," 55–56 (n. 18 above).

summary. Yet, this does not explain why LO summarizes events in Greece and not in Asia Minor. Given that the date of composition was circa 1210 or slightly later, it is unlikely that Choniates, who by that time was well established at Nicaea, was not informed of events in the eastern part of the empire. The omission of the east is most likely related to the author himself and his situation in Nicaea rather than to an informant or lack thereof. We have already seen the historian complain in LO about his living circumstances. These complaints become more specific on one particular occasion: “Our transfer to the east has in no way improved our situation, but we are again flooded with sorrow and are supported only by God, receiving no assistance from the emperor” (635.95–97 O addendum lines 7–10).⁷¹ Could the author’s bitterness have caused him to leave out an extensive report about the east, or is this omission somehow related to the anonymous friend to whom Choniates sent LO and the *Panoplia Dogmatike*?

The identity of this individual remains unknown, but it is worth considering whether it was Constantine Mesopotamites. As already mentioned, Mesopotamites has been securely identified as the owner of Laurentianus IX 24. It is certainly of great interest to note that only MSS PLO contain the critical passage about the fraudulent ways of Michael Stryphnos, brother-in-law of Empress Euphrosyne Kamatera and *megas doux* under Alexios III (541.41 PLO).⁷² According to Choniates, it was this individual who was primarily responsible for ousting Mesopotamites from his high-ranking position in the administration of Alexios III (491.17ff.). Given that the critical passage on Michael Stryphnos is missing in both the b and a texts, it can be assumed that it was included in PLO for the benefit of its recipient(s). As noted above, P-prior-to-revision contained an earlier version of text written down in Constantinople prior to 1204. According to van Dieten, it was copied at that time by an intimate friend of the author. Moreover, from the preface to the *Panoplia Dogmatike* we learn that Choniates wrote this work upon the request of a friend.⁷³ Significantly, we are also told that this friend had been forced to flee his home at the time of the Latin conquest, and that he did not have access to Choniates’ written works.⁷⁴ It can be thus assumed that this friend was not resident in Nicaea, since

71 πλὴν οὐδὲν ἄμεινον τὰ τῆς τοπικῆς ταυτησί μεταβάσεως τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς εἰσήνεγκαν πράγμασιν, ἀλλ’ ἐσμέν καὶ πάλιν ταῖς λύπαις ὑπέραντλοι καὶ μόνῳ διεξαγόμεθα θεῷ μὴδὲ τῆς ἐκ βασιλείας ἀμοιροῦντες συνάρσεως.

72 ναὶ μὴν καὶ ὁ τοῦ στόλου δοῦξ Μιχαὴλ ὁ Στρυφνός, κασιγνήτῃ τῆς δεσποίνης συνεζευγμένος, δεινότατος ὢν μὴ μόνον γόμφους καὶ ἀγκύρας νηῶν χρυσίου ἀλλάξασθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ λαίφεσιν ἐπιθέσθαι καὶ

ἐξαργυρίσαι πρότονα ἀπαξάπαντος πλοίου μακροῦ τὰ νεώρια Ῥωμαίων ἐκένωσε.

73 van Dieten, *Panoplia Dogmatike*, 57.20–21 (n. 53 above): ὁ δὲ με πολλάκις ἤτησας, τοῦτο καὶ δὴ ἀσπασίως παρέχω σοι, συλλογὴν ποιησάμενος πασῶν αἰρέσεων.

74 Ibid., 57.7–9: κατὰ τουτονὶ τοίνυν τὸν λόγον, ὡ φιλότῃς, καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲν μὲν τῶν πρὸς σύστασιν σώματος θεοφιλείᾳ τῇ σῇ προσενήνοχα, ἐξότου μοι ἐπίσης τῆς

ἐνεγκούσης ὑπὸ τῶν ἐσπερίων ἐθνῶν ἀπελήλασαι. Ibid., 57.25–27: οἱ πολλὰς ἀνέλιπτεν βίβλους καὶ οὕτω τὰ περὶ τῶν αἰρέσεων εἰδέναι μὴ ἔχουσιν ἢ μὴ ἐνευκαίρουντες τῇ ἀναγνώσει ἢ ἐτέρως τὸν κατὰ σκοπὸν ἐκκρουόμενοι.

Choniates also informs him of his own move to the Bithynian capital.⁷⁵ This information is consistent with Mesopotamites' whereabouts after 1204. As metropolitan of Thessalonike, Mesopotamites was forced to flee the city at the time of the Latin conquest, most likely seeking refuge in Epiros, where he remained until the recapture of Thessalonike by Theodore Komnenos Doukas in 1224.⁷⁶

Since LO continues directly from the *Panoplia Dogmatike* without a title, it can be assumed that Choniates' friend also requested an epitome of historical events beginning with the arrival of the fleet of the Fourth Crusade at Constantinople in 1203. Presumably, this friend already possessed the earlier sections of Choniates' historical work, since LO appears simply to continue the narration.⁷⁷ If Mesopotamites was the individual to whom the *Panoplia Dogmatike* and LO were sent, then he should also be identified as the friend who possessed an earlier version of the work written prior to 1204. This would explain why the critical passage on Michael Stryphnos is contained only in versions PLO. The identification of Mesopotamites as the recipient of LO could further explain why Choniates concentrated almost exclusively on western affairs in this version of the text. Mesopotamites could have requested the *Panoplia Dogmatike* as well as an epitome of events in the west since the capture of Constantinople in 1204. However, given Choniates' circumstances in Nicaea, the author possibly chose to omit such information. In any case, the possible identification of a recipient could provide us with a clue as to why Choniates wrote LO in the first place. In light of the above considerations it is clear that LO was not written on the personal initiative of the author, but rather upon request. The lack of criticism in the text and the almost total omission of Theodore Laskaris suggest that at the time of composition around 1210 to 1215 the historian's position in Nicaea was precarious. Perhaps for this reason, he felt the need to court the favor of powerful individuals in the west.

Concerning the chronological order of the versions, it is of paramount importance that b is closer to LO with regard to the events that occurred between July 1203 and April 1204 (535.3–582.46), but has more in common with a in the section τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν (583ff.).⁷⁸ From this, van Dieten concluded that b takes an intermediary position between LO and a in the composition of the *Historia* after 1204,

75 Ibid., 57.16ff.: ...πρὸς τῇ μητρόπολει Βιθυνίας Νικαίᾳ πηξάμενος μόσυνα καὶ τὸ λείπον τοῦ βίου διατοξεύων.

76 See V. Laurent, "La succession épiscopale de la métropole de Thessalonique dans la première moitié du XIIIe siècle," *BZ* 56 (1963): 288–92; van Dieten, *Biographie*, 173–

74 (n. 22 above); Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 2:785 (n. 56 above).

77 As argued by van Dieten, "Introduction," 1:C.

78 Ibid., 1: XCVI.

and therefore suggested a sequence of LO-b-a. This seems the most logical conclusion. However, there are certain problems with van Dieten's theory. First, he assumes that because Choniates did not write LO under propitious conditions (in Selymbria, Constantinople, and Nicaea between 1204 and 1207/8), he later realized the deficiencies of his work, which was written too close to the events it described; and so he revised the whole, paying particular attention to text from 583 onward and leaving the bulk that was written prior to 1204 unchanged, i.e., version b in its final form. However, from the date of composition established here, this hypothesis can no longer be sustained, as it appears that LO was written when the author was already well established in Nicaea and well after the events described.

Second, van Dieten has not indicated a date for the time of composition of the final segment of b (τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν). But as we shall see in the following section, version b-after-1204 can be securely dated to no later than the end of 1206 or the beginning of 1207. Clearly, in the process of revision after 1204 version b preceded LO, which was written some years later. Third, as has already been pointed out, Choniates' treatment of Theodore I Laskaris seems to be of utmost importance in understanding LO. The Nicaean emperor receives Choniates' praise on two separate occasions in the b and LO texts, which are missing in version a. These references concern Laskaris's courageous stance against the Latins in 1203 (544.19, 546.65 bLO). However, in the section τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν, Laskaris is ignored in LO. This omission would not make sense if b was taken over from LO, for why would Choniates, if he indeed wrote LO first, praise Laskaris in the beginning of the work and overlook him at the end? But it does make sense if we assume that for section 535.3–582 (July 1203–April 1204), Choniates utilized the b text as a source for his composition of LO. This would explain the identical references to Laskaris. For the section τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν, he simply continued to write LO “independently.”

When we consider that Choniates wrote LO possibly upon the request of Constantine Mesopotamites in Epiros, then it is not difficult to see why the author no longer felt the need to flatter Laskaris, who is barely mentioned, while the eastern part of the empire receives much less detailed treatment than the west, even though Choniates, by virtue of being at Nicaea, was undoubtedly in a much better position to obtain information on events in Asia Minor. In the end the peculiarities and deficiencies of the LO version can be explained by the circumstances of the author at the time of its composition and the purpose of its undertaking. This conclusion also applies to b(revior) and a(uctior) after 1204.

B(revior) after 1204

The final section of version b is separated into two parts. The first extends from the middle of book two of Alexios III (535.3) to the end of the reign of Alexios V Doukas (582) and the second, τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν, continues the narration from the capture of Constantinople in April 1204 to the events of the Greek rebellion against the Latins in February/March 1205 (582–614.10). It is immediately striking that while the first part follows the structure of the original text, i.e., it is separated into books in accordance with imperial reigns, part two is organized along chronological and geographical lines. This difference in narrative structure reflects the lack of any clearly established imperial reign to take the center stage of the narration. Moreover, the author does not simply continue his previous work, but prefixes it with a title: τοῦ αὐτοῦ λογοθέτου τῶν σεκρέτων καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κρίσεων Νικήτα τοῦ Χωνιάτου ἱστορία τῶν μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν συμβάντων τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (583.1–3 b), almost as if he were writing something to be distinguished from the previous sections.

This is a work of a more personal nature, with the author no longer just an eyewitness, but taking on the role of the protagonist and relating in detail his own sufferings.⁷⁹ It is this history of events after the fall of Constantinople that was aborted on 614.7–10. At its inception it appears to have been carefully planned, as Choniates commences with what can be described only as his ultimate judgment on the collapse of Byzantium (583.3–586.57). He then goes on to relate in chronological sequence events in Greece and Asia Minor, switching back and forth between the two theaters of war. His narration, however, ends abruptly. Choniates first tells us he is going to narrate the Greek revolt against Latin rule in Macedonia and Thrace (beginning February 1205), but then breaks off with a sentence that betrays a sudden change in his own circumstances. This change was none other than the author's move to Nicaea at the end of 1206 or beginning of 1207, as indicated by his closing remarks: “but because I have grown tired of narrating the misfortunes that befell my own people, and since I am already completely immersed in preparing for my transfer to the east, hence I will desist from the narrative and put an end to the vertigo of evils I have presented” (614.7–10 b).⁸⁰ It thus appears that Choniates wrote the final section of version b during his sojourn in Selymbria (April 1204–June 1206) and Constantinople (July–December 1206).

This supposition can be further confirmed by the use of the titles *basileus* and *despotes*, for in version b Choniates still accords Alexios III Angelos the title of *basileus* (608.48, 612.41 b), while he refers to Theodore Laskaris as *despotes* (specifically τὸν εὐτυχέστατον δεσπότην; 602.93 b), son-in-law of the emperor. Remember, Theodore Laskaris may have been proclaimed emperor in the spring of 1205, but his

79 See, for example, 586.79–594.80.

80 ἄλλ' ἀπείρηκα τὰς τῶν οικείων συμφορὰς γραφόμενος, ἤδη δὲ καὶ τῆς ἐς ἔω μεταβάσεως ἅπας γίνομαι, ἐνταῦθα τοῦ λέγειν σχάσας τοῦ τῶν κακῶν ἱλίου πεπαύσομαι.

official coronation did not take place until 1208.⁸¹ Significantly, the title of the final segment of the b text (ἱστορία τῶν μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν συμβάντων) refers to a history of events rather than a history of the reign of Theodore Laskaris. Indeed, the historian's attitude to Alexios III and Theodore I in this section of the b text is of critical significance. As mentioned above, Theodore Laskaris receives the historian's praise on two occasions in the bLO texts. The first, in book two of the reign of Alexios III, relates Laskaris's courageous stance against the Latins in the early days of July 1203: "At just this time the war was conducted by the emperor's son-in-law, Theodore Laskaris. Furiously engaging in the struggle, he appeared to the Latins as one of the most martial of Roman men on account of his deeds" (544.19 bPLO).⁸² The second is a remark made by the author concerning the withdrawal of the Byzantine troops when confronted with the Latin ranks before the land walls of Constantinople (17 July 1203): "A work of deliverance would have occurred had the troops moved uniformly against the enemy *or* had the emperor conceded [leadership of] the conflict to his relative Laskaris to vigorously engage the Latins" (546.65 bPLO).⁸³ These statements were subsequently removed from version a.

It is of equal significance that this phenomenon also occurs in Choniates' treatment of Alexios III, who even after the fall of Constantinople hardly receives any criticism from the historian (536.22–23; 538.67–69; 545.54; 546.57–59, 65–68, 72; 556.80–81; 612.41–45 bLO). Much the same can be observed in Choniates' treatment of Alexios III in the *Panoplia Dogmatike*, a text that precedes the historical events narrated in LO in the respective manuscripts, but significantly has more in common with b than any other version of the *Historia*.⁸⁴ In version a, this is no longer the case. In fact, both Alexios III and Theodore I are harshly condemned by Choniates on numerous occasions.⁸⁵ As we have seen, when the author was writing his closing remarks in version b he was preparing his move to Nicaea. Choniates' establishment of some sort of connection with the court

81 See A. Heisenberg, *Neue Quellen zur Geschichte des lateinischen Kaisertums und der Kirchenunion*, vol. 2, *Die Unionsverhandlungen vom 30. August 1206: Patriarchenwahl und Kaiserkrönung in Nikaia 1208*, SBMünchen (Munich, 1923), 10–12; A. Christophilopoulou, *Ἐκλογή, Αναγόρευσις καὶ Στέψις τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ Αυτοκράτορος* (Athens, 1956), 170–75. For a different view see Gounarides, "Χρονολογία," 59–71 (n. 57 above), who redates Laskaris's coronation to April 1207.

82 καὶ μάλιστα ἥνικα διεστρατήγει τὸν

πόλεμον ὁ τοῦ βασιλέως γαμβρὸς Θεόδωρος ὁ Λάσκαρις· οὗτος γὰρ βραγδαίστερον συμπλεκόμενος εἶναι καὶ παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις ἀρεϊκοὺς ἀνδρας τοῖς Λατίνοις ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἐξέφαιεν.

83 ἡ τῷ κηδεστῇ Λάσκαρι τὴν συμπλοκὴν συγκεχώρηκεν συμμιῖσαι τοῖς Λατίνοις σφαδάζοντι.

84 van Dieten, "Introduction," 1:XCII (n. 4 above). This could perhaps be attributed to the fact that Choniates began writing the *Panoplia Dogmatike* in Selymbria (see van Dieten, *Biographie*, 46–47 [n. 22 above])

when, as I have argued here, he was still engaged in the composition of the b text. *Panoplia Dogmatike* (book 27), ed. S. Eustratiades in Michael Glykas, *Εἰς τὰς ἀπορίας τῆς Θείας Γραφῆς κεφάλαια* (Athens, 1906), 1: κβ': ὁ γὰρ Ἰσαακίου κασίγνητος, ὃς ἡ κλήσις Ἀλέξιος, αὐταρχήσας, ἡπίως τῶν πραγμάτων ἤπτετο καὶ οὔτε τὰ εἰς τὸν πόλεμον ἀπρομήθευτος ἦν καὶ ῥύδην καὶ ἀκαθέκτως φερόμενος, οὔτε φιλοπράγμων περὶ τὰ δόγματα.

85 Choniates' criticism of Alexios Angelos in the a text is well known. For Theodore Laskaris see 625.28–46.

of Theodore I Laskaris is evidenced primarily by his authorship of a number of encomia in praise of this emperor, including the celebrated *Selention*, delivered at the beginning of Lent in February 1208.⁸⁶ We have an encomium dated as early as the summer of 1206 and an oration to be delivered by Laskaris before his subjects at the beginning of Lent 1207.⁸⁷ Choniates' last surviving encomium to Laskaris dates to 1211, and was written on the occasion of the latter's triumphant victory over the Seljuk Turks in the battle of Antioch.⁸⁸

In the year 1213/14 we find Choniates still in the service of Laskaris. The historian wrote a letter to Theodore Laskaris's uncle, Basil Kamateros, who was to be sent to Sis to escort the future bride of the emperor, Philippa (a niece of the Rupenid ruler of Lesser Armenia Leo II), back to Nicaea. Choniates, who was apparently to accompany Kamateros on this mission, excuses himself from the task because of other preoccupations.⁸⁹ Since Laskaris's first wife, Anna, died in 1213, Choniates can have written the aforementioned letter only after this date.⁹⁰ So it appears that Choniates was in the service of Laskaris in one capacity or another from his arrival at Nicaea at the end of 1206 or beginning of 1207 to at least the year 1214, if not later.

However, in the early days of the Nicaean empire the position of Laskaris was not securely established. His father-in-law, Alexios III, had not relinquished his claim to the throne and Laskaris, who was recognized as emperor only by the Greeks in western Asia Minor, had not been crowned.⁹¹ The thirteenth-century historian George Akropolites gives us a glimpse into this delicate situation when he relates that the Prouseans accepted Laskaris as emperor "in place of his father-in-law."⁹² This vacillating state of affairs must have placed Choniates in a difficult position, as he was still expecting to play an active role in political affairs. His solution was neutrality; his praise of Laskaris on the one hand, and his cautious treatment of Alexios on the other, point to his uncertainty about a final resolution, and consequently confirm that the historian wrote the final section of the b text before the date of Laskaris's coronation in 1208. This is why Choniates

86 van Dieten, *Biographie*, 140–43. For the text, see Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 120–28 (n. 39 above).

87 van Dieten, *Biographie*, 143–55, 162–65. For the texts, see Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 129–47 and 176–85. Concerning the encomium dated to 1206, van Dieten has suggested that Choniates, still a refugee in Thrace or Constantinople, sent the work to Theodore Laskaris as a sort of rhetorical self-introduction before his migration to Nicaea.

88 Text in *Orationes et epistulae*, 170–76. For the dating and analysis, see van Dieten, *Biographie*, 161–62.

89 *Orationes et epistulae*, 216–17.

90 See van Dieten, *Biographie*, 182–86.

91 M. Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile: Government and Society under the Laskarids of Nicaea, 1204–1261* (London, 1975), 13; A. Savvides, *Byzantium in the Near East: Its Relations with the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum in Asia Minor, the Armenians of Cilicia*

and the Mongols, AD c. 1192–1237 (Thessaloniki, 1981), 54–90.

92 *Georgii Acropolitae Opera*, ed. A. Heisenberg (Leipzig, 1903), 1:10–11. For Laskaris's difficult position prior to his coronation, see Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 131–32 and Geoffrey of Villehardouin, "The Conquest of Constantinople," in *Joinville and Villehardouin, Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. M. R. B. Shaw (Harmondsworth, 1963), 110.

describes Alexios III Komnenos as still “emperor of the Romans” and why the structure of this part of the text is organized along chronological and geographical lines.

A(uctior)

A most peculiar feature of the *Historia* is the existence of passages prior to 535.3 (arrival of the fleet of the Fourth Crusade in 1203) whose composition must be dated after the fall of Constantinople. These particular passages are contained only in a(uctior).⁹³ For example, at 203.75ff., Choniates praises Manuel I Komnenos for successfully countering the threat posed to the empire by the Latins, for later events demonstrated that the “ship of state” almost sank after the death of this wise helmsman. This sentence clearly presupposes the catastrophe of 1204. Apart from this, the remainder of the passage criticizes the emperor, thus contradicting the praise that had gone just before (203.58ff.). This, of course, would not make sense if both passages were written at the same time. However, it is perfectly reasonable to view the passage beginning at 203.75 as a later addition stemming from a better understanding of Manuel’s policies afforded to the author with the benefit of hindsight.

A(uctior) represents the final revision of the text undertaken by the author in the closing years of his life. Because this version remains unfinished, it can be inferred that Choniates died before he could complete it. This can be concluded from a comparison with the skillful endings of the first main part of the work at 579.82–582.46 and with LO 653.26–655.65. Version a, on the contrary, ends abruptly with the expedition of the Latin emperor Baldwin against the Cumans and the Vlachs (August–November 1206).⁹⁴ This version manifests clear signs of having been carefully planned and methodically executed. Choniates revises the entire text—from beginning to end—cautiously and assiduously, paying particular attention to details. Numerous episodes are to be found only in the a text, while for those passages that b and a have in common, a offers considerably more information. One should also note in a the more precise dates, the attention paid to forward and back references, the correction of errors, and the simplification of complex sentences.⁹⁵

Version a is separated into three parts: the first: χρονική διήγησις τοῦ Χωνειάτου κύρ Νικήτα ἀρχομένη ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Ἰωάννη τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ καὶ λήγουσα μέχρι τῆς ἀλώσεως τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (1–582); the second: τοῦ αὐτοῦ Χωνειάτου τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως συμβάντα τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις (583–646 unfinished); and the third: τοῦ αὐτοῦ μακαρίτου κύρ Νικήτα τοῦ Χωνειάτου ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτοῦ ἱστορίας τῆς περὶ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (647–55). One can immediately observe the significance that the capture of Constantinople assumes in the titles; it is the culmination of the first section and the

93 van Dieten, “Introduction,” 1:XCIV.

94 Ibid., 1:XCIV.

95 Ibid., 1:XCIV, LXXIII–LXXIV.

point of departure of the second. This clearly indicates the reorientation of the historical narrative.

At this point, however, a distinction should be made between the first two parts of the work and the third. In its original form the final section (*De statu*s) was part of the LO text.⁹⁶ It seems to have been incorporated into the *Historia* proper after the author's death, as evidenced by, among other things, the title: τοῦ αὐτοῦ μακαρίτου. Although Choniates certainly used sections of LO to compose the a text, he never intended *De statu*s to be included in the larger work. This can be illustrated by the reuse in a of the following passage in LO. The melting down of the large equestrian statue at the Forum Tauri comes near the end of LO, in the section where Choniates describes the statues destroyed by the Latins in Constantinople either for legitimate financial reasons or simply out of greed (649.58–78). In version a, the melting of this statue is placed earlier in the narrative and interpreted as a precautionary measure the conquerors took on account of the rumors circulating that under the sole of the horse's hoof lay the image of a Latin pierced through with a nail (643.11–644.40). Although Choniates clearly contradicts himself in the explanation for the destruction of the statue, this should not be taken to indicate that he did not carefully consider the reuse of this passage. Instead, it seems that Choniates cautiously selected the information he used from LO, but never planned to incorporate the final section into his main text. The *De statu*s largely laments the destruction of the statues in Constantinople by the "barbarian" conquerors. This did not fit well with Choniates' main argument of an internal collapse in version a, which is precisely why he overlooked it.

Unlike the previous versions, the titles in version a do not provide the official positions that the author held in government. This could be taken to mean that the author no longer held any official positions or that he desired to separate himself and his work from any association with the regime. Indeed, version a is the only version of the *Historia* that was written on the personal initiative of Niketas Choniates and not upon request. The authorial purpose can be revealed only by comparing version b to version a. More important than the analysis of individual alterations and additions is the observation of a general trend that distinguishes the earlier version from the later. This trend manifests itself as a tendency toward criticism and moralizing that ultimately results in a frightening indictment against Byzantium's entire military and civil establishment. This attitude is then extended to include virtually all the inhabitants of the empire, who are unfavorably compared with foreigners, hence the more favorable treatment of the Latins in certain passages of the a text.⁹⁷ The author's intrusion into the narrative is most evident in this version, as Choniates assumes the role of a stern

96 Apart from LO, this fragment is included only in the final section of V (designated V^a by van Dieten) and Z (Marcianus Graecus XI 22, 13/14th c.), a compendium of Byzantine authors.

97 See 477.68–478.1 om. b and esp. 614.10 onward, where version b breaks off.

chastiser of his contemporaries' evils, denouncing and censuring his compatriots, whether emperors, churchmen, or laymen, in an emotionally charged, personal evaluation of an era of Byzantine history.

Viewed from this perspective it becomes evident that the author's purpose in revising the text was to explain the catastrophic events of 1204. As is clear in the final embittered section of his history (614.10ff.), Choniates was deeply disappointed by political developments after the fall of Constantinople. The splintered states of Byzantium succeeded only in promoting factional strife and local independence among their own people. The historian harshly condemns the Byzantines in the east for their indifference to the sufferings of their compatriots in the west, for their tendency to divide into factions instead of uniting to resist the conquerors, and for their foolish and persistent fixation on electing emperors (625.28–46). Significantly, the rulers of Asia Minor in the early days after the Latin conquest—Manuel Mavrozomes, Theodore Laskaris, and David Komnenos—are likened to *πολυαρχία*, “a three-headed monster constituted of the foolish” (625.44–46). The Greeks in the west were no better: “they invested themselves with evil tyrannies, and while it was their duty to oppose the Latins, they surprisingly made peace with them and fought against each other” (637.38–40).⁹⁸

Choniates' disillusionment at these conditions is the primary motivating factor for his final revision. His despair is personal, not a literary trope, and magnified by the tragedy of his own situation. As we have seen, Choniates had abandoned version b of his historical work as he was preparing to move to Nicaea, presumably in order to enter the service of Theodore I Laskaris.⁹⁹ Although it has been established that Choniates was in the service of the emperor from the date of his arrival at Nicaea to at least the year 1214, the historian's own testimony makes it clear that he was not appointed to any office in the new government and that his hopes for a brighter future in Nicaea never materialized.¹⁰⁰ Choniates tells us that in Nicaea he and his family were forced to reside, along with other refugees, in overcrowded churches and wooden shacks alongside Lake Askania.¹⁰¹ These arrangements were not temporary, for the author complains about his living conditions in the preface of the *Panoplia Dogmatike* and in LO, both of which were written several years after the historian had established himself in Nicaea. In the

98 *κακοδαίμονας τυραννίδας περιεβάλ-
λοντο, καὶ δέον φιλεχθρεῖν Λατίνοις, οἱ δ'
ἀντωφθάλμουν ἀλλήλοις καὶ Λατίνοις, τὸ
καινόν, ἐσπένδοντο.*

99 It is unlikely that Choniates made a spontaneous decision to move to the Byzantine court in exile in Nicaea. Michael Choniates (1:354.8–11 [n. 22 above]) informs

us that he left together with his brother-in-law and former colleague in the administration, John Belissariotes. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Choniates and Belissariotes planned their migration in advance with the aim of entering the service of Theodore I Laskaris. While in Constantinople (July–December 1206)

Choniates received the news that he would be welcome in Nicaea and therefore decided to end his history.

100 See also van Dieten, *Biographie*, 49–50.

101 van Dieten, *Panoplia Dogmatike*, 57.16ff. (n. 53 above); Choniates, *Historia* 635.95ff. LO.

last pages of version a, written some years later, Choniates repeats his grievances, this time bewailing the loss of his splendid official position and abundant wealth in Constantinople and lamenting his fate as an unwanted refugee who is deprived of his livelihood and still forced to reside “as if captive” on the shore of Lake Askania (645.65ff.).

Choniates’ correspondence during his sojourn in Nicaea explains further the author’s situation in the Bithynian capital. We thus learn that he entered the service of an anonymous *protovestiaros*, although the duties he performed for this individual are unknown.¹⁰² The historian himself tells us that as soon as the *protovestiaros* arrived in Nicaea, he (Choniates) was taken into his service, performing whatever tasks the *protovestiaros* requested.¹⁰³ When the latter neglected to provide Choniates with his due earnings, Choniates petitioned his old acquaintance Basil Kamateros to intervene on his behalf. He entreated Kamateros to use his influence to compel the *protovestiaros* to honor the promises he had made to him, and claimed that he and his family were now on the brink of starvation.¹⁰⁴ In another letter addressed to Kamateros, Choniates reminded him of his earlier petition, which at that point had not yet been granted, and he once again complained about his miserable situation in Nicaea.¹⁰⁵ In all, from Choniates’ correspondence with Kamateros we are led to believe that the latter had been rather influential in ensuring Choniates’ professional status in the court of Alexios III, and thus it is only natural that the author would turn to his former patron, who was now a powerful figure in Nicaea.¹⁰⁶

Basil Kamateros was not the only individual to whom Choniates turned for assistance in Nicaea. He appears to have courted the favor of a number of powerful individuals, including his former colleague in Constantinople and later patriarch in Nicaea, Theodore Eirenikos.¹⁰⁷ In his letters to Eirenikos, Choniates complains bitterly about his ill-treat-

102 Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 211.4–5 (n. 39 above). Van Dieten (*Biographie*, 178 n. 4) has suggested that the anonymous *protovestiaros* can perhaps be identified with the future emperor John Vatatzes (1222–1254) through a passage in George Akropolites (*Georgii Acropolitae Opera*, 1:26.22ff. [n. 92 above]). This passage, however, relates that Vatatzes had received the title of *protovestiarites* (not *protovestiaros*) before assuming the imperial throne. These were two different honorary titles in the court hierarchy at Nicaea. See also D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London, 1968), 108.

103 Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 211.4–

5. A precise date is very difficult to establish since the *protovestiaros* remains anonymous.

104 Ibid., 210.36ff.

105 Ibid., 203.13ff., dated by van Dieten to Choniates’ arrival in Nicaea (1206/7): *Biographie*, 172.

106 Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, esp. 209.20–30: ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ πρότερον ἐν τῇ εὐθηνίᾳ ἡμῶν βραχέσιν ἐκ τῶν μεγιστάνων τὸν νοῦν προσεῖχομεν καὶ τούτων, οὓς ἡδεῖμεν λόγῳ καὶ παιδείᾳ χαίροντας καὶ τῷ δικαίῳ μερίδα βραβεύοντας, ὧν ὁ κράτιστος ἅμα καὶ βέλτιστος ἦσθα σὺ καὶ οὐχ ἕτερος· καὶ νῦν δὲ ταπεινωθέντες καὶ πάντων ἐκπεσόντες ὑπὸ τῶν καταρατοτάτων ἐσπερίων ἐθνῶν καὶ μήτε πόλιν μήθ’ ἐστὶαν μήτε τι τῶν ἄλλων ἔχοντες, ὧν

ἀπαραιτήτως χρῆζουσιν ἄνθρωποι, οὐδενὶ προσηρμόσθημεν ἐς δεῦρο τῶν ἐναντίως ἐχόντων πρὸς ἀρετὴν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλιν σοὶ πρόσμιεν καὶ σοῦ μόνου δίκην κιττῶν ἐξεχόμεθα καὶ δι’ ὅσα μὲν εὖ ποιεῖν ἡμᾶς προὔθου πολλάκις λαθικηδὴ μετιῶν φάρμακα, οὐκ ἔλαττον δὲ διὰ τὴν σὴν ἐμπειρίαν καὶ φρόνησιν καὶ τὴν ἄδολον φιλίαν καὶ τὴν χρηστοῦσιν ψυχὴν. For Kamateros’s position in Nicaea see Michaelis *Choniatae epistulae*, 208–11 (n. 30 above); Angold, *Laskarids*, 62, 70–71 (n. 91 above).

107 For this individual see A. I. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Θεόδωρος Εἰρηνικός πατριάρχης οἰκουμενικός,” *BZ* 10 (1901): 187–92.

ment at the hands of the “powerful” in Nicaea, but assures Eirenikos that he would not entreat anyone or resort to feigning the beggar so as to arouse people’s sympathies.¹⁰⁸ In another letter, Choniates tactfully reminds Eirenikos of his miserable situation in Nicaea and asks him not to believe the vicious rumors that were circulating about him.¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, we are not told what these rumors were, but it appears that Choniates had been repudiated by the circle of elites in Nicaea and was thus in desperate need of support. Indeed, the author repeatedly complains about his living conditions in his letters to Constantine Mesopotamites, Michael Autoreianos, and many others.¹¹⁰ Allowing for a certain degree of rhetorical exaggeration, it is nevertheless clear that the once wealthy, successful, and respected statesman ended his life in poverty and obscurity.¹¹¹ It seems that he was overlooked by Theodore Laskaris and neglected by powerful friends, such as Basil Kamateros, Theodore Eirenikos, and Constantine Mesopotamites.¹¹² In version a, Choniates exacted his revenge on these individuals through his harsh criticism and ridicule.¹¹³

These circumstances then form the background for the composition of version a. Amid these appalling conditions, the now older and wiser Choniates appears to have discovered the ultimate means of self-expression, an expression that was denied to him when he was composing his original history under the constraints imposed by his role as a civil servant and dependent of the emperor. During the historian’s final years, these restrictions appear to have been lifted due to his withdrawal from active political life. Perhaps this is why in the title of the a text his name is no longer accompanied by the full array of his illustrious offices in government, but only by the simple *κῦρ*. Version a was most likely written between circa 1215 and 1217, the final years of the historian’s life. He must have composed it while still residing as a “captive” alongside Lake Askania, either in an overcrowded tent or a wooden shack, impoverished and betrayed. Freedom of expression and emotional torment are a powerful combination, one that produced what has justifiably been described as a *monumentum aere perennius*, the final version of the *Historia*.¹¹⁴

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108 Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 207.10ff., dated by van Dieten to before 1214; *Biographie*, 176.

109 Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 213.12ff., dated by van Dieten to 1208/9; *Biographie*, 179.

110 Choniates, *Orationes et epistulae*, 205.10ff., 207.5ff., 208.32ff., 209.23ff.,

213.12ff., 215.4ff.

111 See also van Dieten, *Biographie*, 10, who argues that Michael Choniates was much more influential than Niketas. This is perhaps why other members of the family, who sought to advance their own careers, congregated around Michael in Greece rather than Niketas in Asia Minor.

112 Ibid., 49.

113 See revised passages in 485.4–486.42, 488.21–489.30 (Basil Kamateros), 439.70–72, 440.81–85, 440.85–441.9, 484.76–485.3, 489.47–492.50 (Constantine Mesopotamites), 492.51–493.62 (Theodore Eirenikos).

114 van Dieten, *Biographie*, 55.

This paper is based on my unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Studies on the Composition of Niketas Choniates' *Historia*" (King's College London, 2004), which will ultimately form the basis of a book on the *Historia* of Niketas Choniates. The present discussion, which focuses entirely on the dating and circumstances of composition of the different versions of the text, is an introduction to a future detailed analysis intended to expose the significance of the versions of the *Historia*. Thanks are due to the anonymous readers and to Dr. A.-M. Talbot for their instructive comments. All uncredited translations are my own.